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Small stories as a new perspective in narrative and identity analysis

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Abstract

In this article, we depart from our recent work on 'small stories', which we propose as an antidote to canonical narrative studies, and we advance our argumentation by sketching out a five-step analytical operation for tapping into small stories as sites of identity work. These steps grow out of the model of positioning (as put forward by Bamberg 1997, and elaborated in Bamberg 2004a; cf. also Georgakopoulou 2000) that succeeds in navigating between the two extreme ends of fine-grained micro analysis and macro accounts. We will work with positioning in the close analysis of a small story event (as part of a moderated group discussion involving ten-year-old boys in an American school) in which we will show how the teller's announcement of the story, the subsequent withdrawal, and the pre-telling negotiation with the interlocutors are as integral parts of our analysis as the actual telling. We will also demonstrate how viewing story content as a function of interactional engagement opens up new insights into identity constructions of sameness in the face of adversarial conditions and constant change.

Keywords: small stories; positioning; identity analysis, author/animator/principal; identity dilemma.

1. Introduction

Although a diverse endeavor, narrative research in (socio)linguistics and other disciplines (e.g., sociology, psychology) tends to employ specific kinds of data and methodologies which in turn generate a specific analytic vocabulary. In particular, departing from Labov's (1972) influential model, numerous studies have focused on research or clinical elicitation techniques to pull for narratives that are invariably about nonshared, personal experience, past events. These stories (cf. life stories,

autobiographies, short-range stories of landmark events) are often employed as heuristics for the inquiry into tellers' representations of past events and how the tellers make sense of themselves in light of these past events; in short, these stories have often been taken as more or less unmediated and transparent representations of the participants' subjectivities and from there as reflecting back on their identities (for a critique, see Atkinson and Delamont 2006). The guiding assumption here is that stories are privileged forms/structures/systems for making sense of self by bringing the coordinates of time, space, and personhood into a unitary frame so that the sources 'behind' these representations (such as 'author', 'teller', and 'narrator') can be made empirically visible for further analytical scrutiny in the form of 'identity analysis'. The 'narrative turn' that has been sweeping through much of the social sciences over the last twenty years has espoused this kind of rationale and has become of major methodological influence in the fields of identity research (see chapters in Bamberg 2006; Brockmeier and Carbaugh 2001; Daiute and Lightfoot 2004; De Fina et al. 2006).

Our point of departure here is our view that the assumptions, sensibilities, and interpretive idiom warranted by this approach to the analysis of narratives (which we will variably refer to as the 'autobiographical model', the 'narrative canon', or simply 'big story research') have filtered down to analytic work on conversational (cf. non-elicited) narratives. As a result, they have informed analysts' definitions of what constitutes a (tellable) story and/or a story that can be used as a point of entry into identity analysis. There is undoubtedly recognition that the narratives told outside research or clinical interviews depart significantly from the autobiographical model (e.g., Ochs and Capps 2001; Schegloff 1997); there are also studies of conversational storytelling that have taken an interactional approach (i.e., narrative-as-talk-in-interaction, e.g., C. Goodwin 1984, 1986; M. H. Goodwin 1990; Jefferson 1978). Nonetheless, we believe that there is still much scope for documenting the forms and contexts of these 'other' atypical stories, the analytical tools appropriate for them, and last but not least, their consequentiality for narrative cum identity research, which is currently a focal concern in the study of narrative in a wide range of social science disciplines.

While it is worthwhile to invest efforts in investigating what narratives *are* and what they consist of, structurally as well as interactively, our point of departure is more grounded in a functional perspective on narrative and language use in general. In line with a general shift toward narratives as tools of interpretation (De Fina et al. 2006), we are interested in the social actions/functions that narratives perform in the lives of people: how people actually use stories in everyday, mundane situations in order

to create (and perpetuate) a sense of who they are. Narratives are thus focused upon not as tools for reflecting on (chunks of) lives but as constructive means that are functional in the creation of characters in space and time, which in turn are instrumental for the creation of positions vis-à-vis co-conversationalists. Narratives are also aspects of situated language use, employed by speakers/narrators to position a display of contextualized identities.

In our individual work, we have begun to give voice to and argue for the 'worthiness' of stories that are still in the fringes of narrative research and that we call *small stories* both for literal (these tend to be brief stories) and metaphorical reasons (i.e., in the spirit of a late modern focus on the micro, fleeting aspects of lived experience). We have identified certain salient types of such small stories in the discourse and social practices of a group of female adolescents that were studied ethnographically in a Greek town: breaking news, projections, references (to stories of shared events), among others (Georgakopoulou 2007). We have begun to chart the textual/interactional features of such small stories and explore how they can feed into the mainstay analytic vocabulary such as evaluation/tellability and the analysis of narrative that links specific linguistic choices with larger social roles and identities (Georgakopoulou 2006a, 2006b).

We have also documented how it becomes possible to frame the micro analysis of small stories as a window into the micro-genetic processes of identities as 'in-the-making' or 'coming-into-being' (cf. Bamberg 2004a, 2004b), forming the background against which identities in life-event or biographic interviews can become foci of investigations within the framework of more traditional narrative methodologies.

Within this type of approach to narrative, our aim is to contribute to a reconceptualization of the 'identity dilemma', that is, that we are clinging onto the illusion of staying or actually 'being' the same through simultaneously changing all the time: We seem to gain our sense of constancy by way of continuously changing. Conceptualizing narratives-in-interaction (with emphasis on small stories) as the sites of engagement where identities are continuously practiced and tested out, we have begun to show how these practices lend themselves to developmental prerequisites that eventually may lead up to the ability to engage in more reflective positions in the form of life stories that are typically elicited in clinical or research settings. It is in the everyday practices as sites of engagement that 'identity work' is being conducted; we believe that such continuous and repetitious engagements ultimately lead to habitus (plural) that become the source for a continuous sense of who we are—a sense of us as 'same' in spite of continuous change. The actual 'work' that is being conducted by individuals in interactive engagement, so to speak, feeds into a sense of

self—in the form of a continuous process within which this sense comes to existence (*emerges*).

In this article we will advance these lines of argumentation by specifically looking at identity work through small stories in terms of a model of positioning (as put forward by Bamberg 1997 and elaborated in Bamberg 2004a; cf. also Georgakopoulou 2000) that succeeds in navigating between the two extreme ends of fine-grained micro analysis and macro accounts. It more specifically allows us to explore self at the level of the talked-about, that is, as a character within the story and at the level of tellership in the here-and-now of a storytelling situation. Both of these levels feed into the larger project at work within the global situatedness within which selves are already positioned: with more or less implicit and indirect referencing and orientation to social positions and discourses above and beyond the here-and-now.

This model of positioning affords us with the possibility to view identity constructions as two-fold. We are able to analyze the way the referential world is constructed with characters in time and space as well as a function of the interactive engagement.[1] In this sense, how the referential world is constructed points to how the teller *wants to be understood*, what sense of self they index. It is precisely this groundedness of self and identity in interactive engagement that is at best undertheorized and at worst left out in traditional narrative research.

Our positioning analysis in small stories turns the tables on a typical interview narrative elicitation scenario (researcher elicits story to explore aspects of the researched self) to see what happens when the researched (in this case, a group of ten-year-old boys in a lower-class East Coast American elementary school talking to each other in the presence of the moderator) engage in identity work that attends to peer-group roles, dynamics, and shared interactional history on one hand and to the interview situation (including the moderator) on the other hand. We are consciously choosing to work with a small story that occurred in an interview situation to make tangible our point about the necessity of including small stories in the main agenda of narrative and identity analysis: The strip of discourse activity that we will analyze routinely gets dismissed by biographical approaches (i.e., not seen as a story), is seen as analytic nuisance (i.e., as the result of bad interviewing), or is subsumed under the focal concerns of the big story (i.e., viewed as an instance of incoherent telling, not yet incorporated in the life story, etc.).

In contrast to this, we hope to show how, by entering narrative identity work from the perspective that selves are constantly changing, we can look into concrete sites of engagement in which small stories are negotiated and empirically scrutinize the procedures (repertoires) used by tellers

in their talk in order to establish a particular sense of self. Here, we will pay particular attention to the formation of a sense of self in the face of different discursive pulls: one toward a strong sense of (unrelational) masculinity according to which it is uncool to invest in relationships with the other, the other pulling toward a relational stance, according to which it is cool to 'have a girlfriend'.

2. Small stories

As suggested, the emphasis on full-fledged stories within sociolinguistic approaches to narrative is partly traceable to Labov's model, which was based on researcher-prompted, personal experience, past events. More generally, though, the elicitation of interview narratives (life stories or 'key' episodes) as the mainstay qualitative method in social sciences has put big stories firmly on the map. It is thus not surprising that, as Ochs and Capps (2001: 57) have pointed out, there is a lingering bias in conventional narrative analysis for narratives with the following qualities: 'A coherent temporal progression of events that may be reordered for rhetorical purposes and that is typically located in some past time and place. A plotline that encompasses a beginning, a middle, and an end, conveys a particular perspective and is designed for a particular audience who apprehend and shape its meaning'.

In contrast to this, we have been employing 'small stories' as an umbrella term that captures a gamut of underrepresented narrative activities, such as tellings of ongoing events, future or hypothetical events,[2] and shared (known) events, but it also captures allusions to (previous) tellings, deferrals of tellings, and refusals to tell. These tellings are typically small when compared to the pages and pages of transcript of interview narratives. On a metaphorical level, though, the term locates a level and even an aesthetic for the identification and analysis of narrative: the smallness of talk, where fleeting moments of narrative orientation to the world can be easily missed out by an analytical lens that only takes fully fledged ('big') stories as the prototype from where the analytic vocabulary is supposed to emerge.

Small stories can be about very recent ('this morning', 'last night') or still unfolding events,[3] thus immediately reworking slices of experience and arising out of a need to share what has just happened or seemingly uninteresting tidbits. They can be about small incidents that may (or may not) have actually happened, mentioned to back up or elaborate on an argumentative point occurring in an ongoing conversation. Small stories can even be about—colloquially speaking—'nothing'; as such, they indirectly

reflect something about the interactional engagement between the interactants, while for outsiders, the interaction is literally 'about nothing'.

In short, placing emphasis on small stories allows for the inclusion in the analysis of a gamut of data more or less connected with the narrative canon. Some of them fulfill minimal textualist definitional criteria (e.g., temporal ordering of events) but still do not sit well with the canon (e.g., stories of projected events or tellability, given that the emphasis of traditional narrative inquiry has been on past events). Others may fail those criteria but, if the participants themselves orient to what is going on as a story, we argue that they render such criteria superfluous if not problematic. In all cases, we see small stories as not resting exclusively and reductively on prototypical textual criteria. Their definition as stories is not an all or nothing issue but a more or less issue. In tune with Ochs and Capps (2001), we accept that a set of narrative dimensions (e.g., tellership, tellability, linearity, etc.) that normally characterize a story come with a whole range of possibilities for realization in different stories. More than that, as we will show in our analysis, we stay alert to the fleeting moments of a 'narrative orientation' in interactions, for example, starting a story and not finishing it, signaling that there is a story to tell but not telling it.

Consequently, it is the action orientation of the participants that forms the basic point of departure for our functionalist-informed approach to small stories and, to a lesser degree, what is represented or reflected upon in the stories told. This seems to be what makes our work with small stories crucially different from work with big stories. We are interested in how people use small stories in their interactive engagements to *construct* a sense of who they are, while big story research analyzes the stories as *representations* of world and identities.

3. Data and analysis: 'It wasn't me, hey, I'm Shaggy'

The data presented here come from the first phase (three months) of a longitudinal and cross-sectional study investigating adolescent boys' (ages 10–15) discourse development (Bamberg 2004b). The data collected comprise 'naturally occurring' data from afterschool outings, writings about the 'self', one-to-one (audio-taped) interviews, and (videotaped) moderated group discussions. The data discussed below come from a group discussion session between an adult moderator and four ten-year-olds. After about an hour of talking, when the moderator asked what they find attractive in girls, one of the participants, Victor, makes a bid for the floor. The small story in the excerpt is not about the speaker himself and involves him only inasmuch as he was a bystander or witness to something that (supposedly) happened between his male friend and a

girl from his street. Using Goffman's (1981) distinction between the *author* ('someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded'; 1981: 144), the *animator* ('the talking machine, the thing that sounds comes out of'; 1981: 167), and the *principal* ('someone who believes personally in what is being said and takes the position that is implied in the remarks'; 1981: 167), it is interesting to note that Victor refuses to act in front of the group as animator. He also attempts to distance himself from becoming identified with the principal. Furthermore, as we will see, his authorship extends only to a minimal report, with lots of withdrawals and hesitations. Thus, in terms of *reflecting* on a past sense of self, which according to Freeman (2006) is a main characteristic for research on story identity, we do not have much to work with here. However, in terms of how the participants all orient toward what is 'going on' in the excerpt 'as story', we find a wealth of identity display worth exploring in more detail. (See the appendix for transcription conventions.)

(1) Moderator (Mod), Martin (Ma), Victor (V), Stanton (S), Wally
     (W) (pseudonyms)

 1 Mod: so what what (.) what guys (.) what what is it that (.) sticks
           out (.) eh that you like [(.) in girls
                                     [timber (..) timber wood huhuh=
 2 S: =is it uh the:: eh [the cute face↑
 3 Mod: [I can't get it = ((reaching for pizza slice,
 4 W: Stanton helps him get it))
 5 Mod: =is it (.) [the personality↑=
 6 V: [no I remember once ↓(.)
           =I remember (.) once (.) weird thing (.) I can't tell it though
 7 S: COME ON
 8 V: I promised my friend I wouldn't
 9 Mod: okay (.) then we won't (.) °then we won't° if it is promised
           [then that's what we talked about (.) no no no
10 V: [but I don't care=
11 Ma: =is he at this school=
12 V: no that's why he's not at the school so you guys can't know
           about him
13 Mod: okay↓
14 V: that's why↓=
15 Mod: =but you don't need to mention the [names=
                                              [who cares he's not at
16 W: school °he's not like walking round or something°
17 S: =yeah don't say a name=

18 Mod: =yeah
19 W: don't say the name just say it
20 Mod: but what is it what is it about (.) is it eh=
21 S: my friend because you gonna say=
22 V: =it's about what this (.) what my FRIE::ND likes about a
    girl
23 S: [aha
24 Mod: [is that you think what (.) really [(.) boys like about (.) girls↑
25 S: [SAY it
26 V: =[SAY it
27 S: no it's what HE likes about the girl=
28 Mod: [but it (.) what is different then from what HE says (.)
    from what you think (.) in <u>general</u> (.) boys=
29 V: =can I like someone say it for me coz I don't want to say it
30 W: [fine
31 Ma: [yeah ((leans over to Vic with hand behind ear, signaling
    willingness))
32 Mod: [okay
33 W: I'll say it=
34 V: =I will <u>him</u> say it ((Vic stands up, bends toward Wally,
    smiling))
35 Ma: yah let him
36 V: t'are they there↑ ((looks behind him, left, then behind him,
    right))
37 Mod: nope they aren't
38 V: ((Vic whispers into Walt's ear, Walt then laughs))
39 Ma: °I can hear him°
40 S: I can hear him
41 V+W: ((laughing))
42 Ma: SAY it
43 Mod: okay↓=
44 W: =there's this cute girl that lives on his street and =((signals
    quotation marks with his hands)) HIS FRIE::ND (.) said
    that (.) said that um look at her legs and she was
    wearing a dress and he said (.) WHO::AA (.) even though I
    think it was YOU: ((points at Vic))
45 Mod: =((signaling quotation marks back to Wally)) hehehehe
46 V: ((shakes head 'no')) =it wasn't [me
                           [never never wouldn't [me
47 Mod: Victor wouldn't do (.) so legs (.) [legs good good looking
    legs (.) that's something↑ (.) what about what about person-
    ality↑

48 V: [it wasn't me hey I'm Shaggy (.) it
    wasn't <u>me</u> hey ((dancing-move upper body))
49 all: ((all boys laugh))

Our fine-grained analysis of this excerpt consists of a five-step procedure of tapping into separable yet interrelated positioning processes at work. These positioning levels are dealing with (i) how characters are positioned within the story (level 1); (ii) how the speaker/narrator positions himself (and *is* positioned) within the interactive situation (level 2); and (iii) how the speaker/narrator positions a sense of self/identity with regard to dominant discourses or master narratives (level 3) (for more detail see Bamberg 2004b). For analytic purposes, we subdivided the analytic procedures that contribute to positioning level 2 into three substeps. Thus, first, we will analyze how the characters in the story are positioned in relation to each other and in space and time (*positioning level 1*). Then, we will turn to the interactional accomplishment of *narrating* as the activity under construction in this excerpt (*positioning level 2*). In a third step, we will analyze more closely the research setting in which the moderator has asked a question, how it was answered in the form of telling a story, and what we can conclude from that (*positioning level 2*). Fourth, we will turn to the joint interactional engagement between all participants, particularly the four boys (*positioning level 2*). And finally, we will reflect on how the participants construct each other and themselves in terms of teller roles and in doing so establish a sense of self/identity (*positioning level 3*). Within this final section, we will return to the issue of how much the construction of a sense of self in this segment is due to 'acts of identity' that can be traced back to individual conversational moves or to discourses that seemingly impose themselves onto participant structures and individual sense-making strategies.

3.1. *Step one: Who are the characters and how are they relationally positioned? (Positioning level 1)*

At first glance, it is not obvious why this segment could be chosen as an example for the construction of 'narrative identity', that is, how a sense of self comes to existence by way of narrating. To begin, Victor, who may be taken to be the author of what emerges later as a sequence of events, does not actually tell or wish to tell the story. He whispers something into Wally's ears, who in turn reports what Victor (supposedly) has told him. But let us start with what we actually have in terms of an event sequence: Turn 44, offered by Wally the narrator, contains two clauses that can be seen as sequentially ordering two events into a temporal contour, that is, implying a temporal boundary between (i) and (ii):

(i)   he [a friend of V] looked at her [a girl's] legs
(ii) and he said WHO::AA

From earlier ruminations of Victor, the audience already knows that this 'friend' does not live in town anymore and that none of the present boys (let alone the moderator) know him. He is constructed as 'anonymous'. The girl in the story realm is also left anonymous, though she is constructed as 'cute' and as 'wearing a dress' in explicitly feminine terms; she also is described as living in Victor's neighborhood—'on the same street'. Thus, we can assume that the encounter took place somewhere in Victor's neighborhood and that Victor (and probably also his friend) are somewhat familiar with this girl. In addition, the audience can also infer that Victor's friend has asked him to keep the 'wooing' incident a secret, for reasons that are up to this point open for speculation. And more generally, the audience can also take into account that the incident has been characterized by Victor early on in turn 6 as 'a weird thing'.

Summing up, Wally shares (as the animator) what Victor (who has systematically refused to act as the animator) has asked him to report, namely a 'minimal event sequence' consisting of a friend's reaction to a girl's legs, a reaction that his friend wants to keep concealed. Victor, the animator of the event sequence vis-à-vis Wally, qualifies this event sequence in his pre-announcement as 'weird'. Victor makes sure to distance himself from this story's authorship in the sequence leading up to turn 44 (e.g., see emphatic reference to 'my FRIEND' in turn 22) and he is also quite resistant to act as the 'public' (in the group in question) animator of the reported events. In the end, he borrows the voice of another boy present (i.e., assigns the role of an animator) so that the report can actually be told and heard and thus become 'public'. On this basis, we do not have a lot to work with when it comes to drawing conclusions about Victor's sense of self or identity. However, Victor also positions himself as somewhat complicit with 'his friend': By protecting his friend's anonymity and by keeping the promise he had made to his friend, he can be interpreted as taking sides, that is, sharing his friend's general orientations. At the very least, he does not position his friend as story character in a critical or deriding way. However, as we will see, Victor's complicity is not fixed either.

3.2. *Step two: The interactive accomplishment of 'narrating'?*
       (Positioning level 2)

Turning next to the analysis of the interactional engagement between the participants, we can spot narrative elements a lot earlier than turn 44. By

uttering 'I remember once' (turn 6), Victor makes something that is 'only' a memory (from some time ago, from a distinct past taleworld: *once*), relevant to the here-and-now of the present engagement, using his 'remembering' as it is typically used, as a story announcement. What is more, 'I remember once' is uttered twice; the second time with a short pause between *I remember* and *once*: what Bauman (2004: 6) would call a 'generic framing device', which sets up expectations about the activity to follow being a storytelling (of past events), is clearly foregrounded. This 'story preface' (Sacks 1974) is immediately followed up by an evaluation of what the story is (supposed to be) about, 'weird thing', which is most likely to be heard as boosting the story's tellability. This is shaping up as a neat story preface turn, setting up an expectation that permission will be granted by the interlocutors for the actual telling to occur. Instead, Victor, at the end of the story preface, withdraws the bid for the floor to tell a story: 'I can't tell it though'. In his next turn (turn 8), he backs up his decision not to share the story because he had promised his friend that he would not. At this point, the audience is not informed about the role of his friend in the story or whether he even has a role in the story. However, it can be assumed that his friend is somehow involved in what has happened in the sequence of events (that are withheld), because otherwise there would not have been any reason to keep the story from becoming public. Linking the evaluation of the story content ('weird thing') with the effort to keep it a secret arguably leaves the audience wanting to hear the sequence of events, as we can see when Stanton urges for the story (turn 7) after Victor's refusal to tell. The negotiation between Victor and his interlocutors who collude in requesting the telling of the story goes on until turn 34. This is in stark contrast to one of the most influential conversation-analytic findings regarding the sequential production of storytelling. Specifically, as Sacks has argued (1992: 122–127), as stories take more than one turn to tell, tellers need to find ways of signaling to the interlocutors that an extended sequence is underway. Sacks has shown how these ways systematically present a three-part canonical structure:

Teller: Story preface
Recipient: Request to hear the story
Teller: Story

In contrast to this, in this case, the withdrawal of the bid to tell a story extends a potentially three-step process to about forty turns, raising interesting teller roles and telling rights. In this process, Victor, who on the

face' of it forgoes the extended floor-holding rights that the story's telling would grant him, still emerges as a main teller-participant: the person who has the story that people want to hear but does not tell·it. To sum up, although there is no actual sequence of events (yet), the way Victor engages his audience is telling. He announces a story and upgrades the story's tellability by two interactive moves: evaluating the story as a clear break from the mundane and everyday ('weird') and then withholding it. In other words, alluding to the potential of a story and rhetorically fore-shadowing its potential content as relevant and highly reportable, without even mentioning any event—let alone event sequence—moves Victor into the role of having the *potential* to contribute to the topic under discussion in a relevant way. Thus, while traditional narrative analysis relies heavily on the story's content (e.g., reportability of events and the breaching of expectations; Bruner 2001, 2003) to reason for its tellability, Victor's interactive moves show tellability as something that is interactively achieved. He could have stopped here—not sharing a story, not breaking his promise—and the audience most likely would have been disap-pointed. However, his allusion to a (tellable) story has already catapulted him into the telling role of an expert on the topic under scrutiny; position-ing himself as someone who has something to share (expert) but is reluc-tant to do so may have consequences for the future interactions among the participants.

3.3. *Step three: How is the speaker positioned within the interactive flow of turns that constitute the situation as 'research'? (Positioning level 2)*

In our next step, we are attempting to integrate the story, its contents (step one) and the way it has been introduced (step two), into the continuous flow of the other participants' moves. To begin, Victor's announcement of a story in turn 6 was in effect an answer to a question: the moderator (turn 1) asking what they like in girls. In a literal sense, the moderator asks for what the participants attribute to 'attractive' or 'likeable' girls. Thus, Victor responds to the moderator who had made a gender category relevant and who could be heard as asking for attributions from them as ten-year-old males. In this sense, the moderator may be also heard as pur-suing a 'research agenda' by eliciting responses from his research partici-pants. Responses in the form of a list of attributions could have done the job. In effect, the question is framed so as to project attributes, particu-larly physical ones (and thus gendered), as the preferred response. The moderator even offers potential members of this list of attributions ('cute

face', 'personality'), but Victor rejects these offerings ('no') and offers in-stead 'a memory'.

Victor's response is at the very least delayed (the attribute of nice 'legs' comes many turns later and not from him as the animator) if not dispre-ferred. By enlisting a memory as his response to the moderator's request, he offers an individual incident as a prime candidate for what makes girls attractive. He thus volunteers (potentially) personal information or testi-mony to back up this incident. At the same time, however, by stressing the fact that this is his friend's story and not his and by ultimately refus-ing to act as the animator of the incident, he also distances himself from the sole authorship and accountability for the reported incident (and by extension attribute).[4] We shall come back to this point of how the bid for the story, as a dispreferred response, and the actual delayed telling ul-timately allow Victor to navigate the dangers involved in taking a stand on 'attractiveness' and 'girls'.

In sum, Victor had options in how to respond to the moderator's re-search agenda and did not have to respond in the form of a narrative ori-entation to 'a memory'. By indicating that he is about to choose a story, he volunteers a more personal approach to the topic under discussion, one that has the potential to implicate himself or others as more 'person-ally involved' at the same time as shifting issues of authorship ('this is not about me, it is about my friend'). When the moderator, in turn 9, signals that he is willing to accept Victor's withdrawal of his story, it is again the role of the researcher that is made relevant: By alluding to the informed consent negotiations, which had taken place ahead of the conversation, he is hearable as stating that 'I, as a researcher, accept your conversational move'. However, by making his role as researcher relevant here, he is also hearable as not accepting Victor's move if it had not been part of a research interview. Victor's immediate re-sponse (in turn 10) that he does not care rejects the moderator's offer and signals, in spite of his previous moves, that he is willing to share the story.

3.4. *Step four: How is the relation between the four boys managed? (Positioning level 2)*

Taking the analyses of what the story is about (step one), how it is em-bedded in its immediate conversational context (step two), and how it forms part of the larger (institutional) context of a research interview (step three), we are struck by Victor's seeming indecisiveness about shar-ing his story. He announces a story, withdraws (with reasons), and when

one member of the audience accepts his withdrawal, he signals (again) that he is actually willing (wanting?) to share his story. Finally, he asks one of his peers to tell 'his' story. In all this, his peers continuously urge Victor to make his story public. The moderator, too, joins them, in spite of his earlier concerns about protecting others' anonymity and only sharing information that everyone feels comfortable sharing. Again, the moderator is hearable as repeatedly attempting to return to his original research agenda (turn 15 'you don't need to mention names', and turns 20 'what is it [the story] about?' and 24 'is that . . . what boys like about girls?'). In turn 29, Victor seems to be giving in to the continuous pressures of his peers and the moderator and is willing to share his story. However, he still signals that he does not want to 'say it'. He 'borrows' Wally as the animator of his story, but before he whispers into Wally's ears, he signals that he does not want to have any unintended audience—such as the research assistants, who are in the vicinity, including two young women—but all this with a smile, signaling a nonserious, nonchalant stance vis-à-vis the story and its content.

In sum, Victor's extensive efforts to share the story, but simultaneously coming across as not *wanting* to share the story, have an interesting double-edginess. In light of the fact that a simple ascription of a few attributes to girls would have satisfied the moderator's agenda, Victor has opted for a storied response that has the potential to implicate him—something that stories typically do. In the face of this, he seems to be attempting to inoculate the interactional implication of any personal involvement—as much as this is possible—by mobilizing the self-lamination that stories afford (see Schiffrin 1990). He stresses the fact that any potential implication of himself as principal, that is, the possibility to be heard as supporting the position from which his friend might have acted, is wrong. It can be assumed that his denial is to be the public animator of the story and agreeing to the compromise of serving as the 'private animator' for Wally are carefully designed to accomplish this. His earlier refusal to tell, the hesitations and self-repairs (e.g., turns 22, 29), and ultimately the 'whispering' of the story attest to his attempt to diffuse responsibility for what is being said and also, to a degree, to show resistance to provide a direct response (Victor's view) to the moderator's question. Thus, we can provisionally conclude that Victor, in terms of his interactional engagement, positions himself as navigating something that is at stake—something that he seems to embrace on one hand, but also something that has the potential to be held against him on the other. We will see that his nondecisiveness, ambiguity, and nonchalance in the way he presents himself in all this are clear indices for something else.

3.5. *Step five: Who am I in all this? (Positioning level 3)*

We will now turn to the analysis of how Victor positions a sense of self-identity vis-à-vis master narratives (or dominant discourses), makes these relevant to the interaction in the here and now, and through all this establishes himself as 'a particular kind of person'. In order to gather as much evidence as possible for our interpretive statements, let us turn to what happens after the story has become public. Victor gets implicated by Wally, the public animator of his story ('but I think it was you'). The implications are (i) YOU actually wooed the girl's legs; and (ii) you fabricated this 'friend' (your story is made up), putting Victor, who had worked hard to avoid this implication, on the defense. Victor's response (turn 48) is telling: He borrows from Shaggy, the Grammy-winning international reggae-pop superstar, and with him the chorus lines from his platinum hit 'It Wasn't Me'.[5] This move has two potential implications.

On the one hand, Victor identifies or 'borrows' from Shaggy, someone who categorically denies involvement, even in the light of overwhelming evidence. In addition, the lyrics of Shaggy's song are symbolic of a hyper-sexuality that posits a type of masculinity that is nonchalant and ultimately uninterested in relational commitments. Victor, who had established himself as the interlocutor who has a story to share, and with it as an authority on the topic under discussion (i.e., what boys like in girls), is thus hearable as aligning himself with Shaggy on precisely this account. He can be understood as positioning a sense of self that is—just like Shaggy's—noncommitted, nonchalant, and ultimately uninterested in girls. At the same time, partly because of his investment in making the story public in that forum, partly because of his double-edginess through-out the story event (as discussed above), he is heard by Wally (and the other participants) as systematically blurring the boundaries between his friend and himself. Thus, Victor is on one hand hearable as one and the same person as his friend, and both of them as interested and to a degree invested in girls; on the other hand, with his persistent distancing from the animator, author, and principal of the story, he also comes across as uninterested in and noncommitted to the topic of the story (girls). This ambivalence and navigation between two conflicting positions is also attested to by the borrowing of Shaggy and the meanings that this borrowing indexically evokes: both engaged in women in largely hegemonic male ways and in (contradictory) denial of this engagement.

To summarize thus far, Vic's careful positioning of the characters in the story and himself in this interaction signals that he is maneuvering in-between two pulls. At first glance, these two pulls can be characterized in terms of coming across as finding girls attractive versus not being inter-

ested in girls at all. As such, Victor can be heard as juggling two 'story-lines'—one according to which he can be seen as being invested in girls and having a girlfriend as something that constitutes a potential gain in social capital, the other in which he comes across as not being attracted to girls and in which hanging out with girls and 'doing girl-stuff' is totally un-cool. This is certainly typical of preadolescent and adolescent (American) boys, where girls 'have cooties' and are at the same time character-ized as 'yuck'.[6] It is also in line with traditional psychological descriptions that tend to inscribe these contradictions in particular developmental phases of growing up as heterosexual (Maccoby 1998). In our view, how-ever, these pulls are windows into two master narratives (or dominant dis-courses), in circulation in Victor's peer group, too, that lead to different and competing positionings.[7] While one discourse may pull Victor toward girls, the other positions him as different from (independent, noncommit-tal) and in contrast to girls. What is perhaps more interesting is how Vic-tor, in his discursive maneuvers between these two positions, presents himself as compliant with but simultaneously resisting both of them.

4. Conclusion

Our analysis has demonstrated how a careful reading of a strip of interac-tion as 'small story' can reveal aspects of identity construction that would have otherwise remained unnoticed. The analysis consisted of a detailed description of the bids, deferrals, and refusals to tell, and the interactional negotiations that in this case led to the telling. In contrast to the big sto-ries approach, we have demonstrated that the fact that the small story that ultimately gets told is not about the teller himself, but about a friend, and the fact that the teller attempts to distance himself from any possible association with the main character of the story, effectively shunning his role as the story's principal and animator, are very significant for what kind of identity is under construction. At the same time, the fact that the teller announces the story and in this way makes the 'having it out in the open' a talking point and a matter of interactional relevance and negotia-tion, in spite of his insistence not to be associated with the main character nor his deeds, provides further insights into the interactional aspects of identity work. Overall, it is the navigation process itself, within which a 'sense of self' is tried out and practiced, that is of interest and forms the core of our approach to identity construction.

Behind this way of approaching and working with stories is an action orientation that is crucially different from work with big stories. This urges us to look at constructions of self and identity as necessarily dialog-

ical and relational, fashioned and refashioned in local interactive practices (cf. chapters in Antaki and Widdicombe 1998). At the same time, it forces us to recognize that doing self is not all that tellers do. They also do rhe-torical work through storytelling: They put forth arguments, challenge their interlocutors' views, and generally attune their stories to various local, interpersonal purposes, sequentially orienting them to prior and up-coming talk. It is in and through this type of relational activity that rep-resentations in the form of content, that is, what the talk is to be taken about, are brought off and come to existence. In contrast, story analyses that remain fixated on the represented contents of the story in order to conclude from that how the teller reflects on him-/herself, miss out on the very interactive and relational constructedness of content and reflection.

Our analysis urges us to scrutinize the inconsistencies, contradictions, moments of trouble and tension, and the tellers' constant navigation and finessing between different versions of selfhood in local contexts. How-ever well established the line of identities-in-interaction may be in the context of the analysis of conversational data, this emphasis is still in contrast to the long-standing privileging of coherence by narrative ap-proaches. Through the scrutiny of small stories in a variety of sites and contexts, our aim is to legitimate the management (or not) of different and often competing and contradictory positions as the mainstay of iden-tity work through narrative. Also, we aim to advance the project of doc-umenting identity as *a process* of constant change at the same time as re-sulting in a sense of sameness.

Appendix: Transcription conventions

[	Overlapping utterances
=	Connects 'latched' utterances
(.)	Indicates a pause that is less than 0.1 seconds
(..)	Indicates a pause that is less than 0.5 seconds and more than 0.1 seconds.
:	Marks an extension of the sound it follows
::	Marks a longer extension
↑	Marks rising (upward) intonation
↓	Marks falling (downward) intonation
° °	Indicates decreased volume of materials between
underlining	Indicates emphasis
CAPITALS	Indicate speech that is louder than the surrounding talk
he, huhuh	Indicates laughter
(( ))	Indicates editorial comments

Notes

1. Our analysis thus starts with traditional linguistic and story categories that stem from structural analyses of prototype-like story structures.

2. In the study of the conversational data of a group of female adolescents (Georgakopoulou 2007), stories of projected events (imagining the future) proved to be more salient—quantitatively speaking, too—than stories of past events; in this case, imagining the future was a more potent and meaningful discourse practice than that of remembering the past.

3. Our research has shown that such small stories of breaking news are salient and powerful narrative meaning-making ways particularly in mediated interactions (e.g., on e-mail; Georgakopoulou 2007) or when the participants have a range of mediational tools (e.g., text messaging) at their disposal alongside face-to-face communication.

4. Accountability is well researched within conversation analysis and discursive psychology. There is evidence to suggest that speakers exploit different aspects of talk in order to mitigate, disarm, or equally flaunt their accountability, that is, their normative responsibility for and commitment to what is being said and done (e.g., Antaki 1994).

5. Chorus:
   But she caught me on the counter
   (It wasn't me)
   Saw me banging on the sofa
   (It wasn't me)
   I even had her in the shower
   (It wasn't me)
   She even caught me on camera
   (It wasn't me)
   She saw the marks on my shoulder
   (It wasn't me)
   Heard the words that I told her
   (It wasn't me)
   Heard the screams gettin' louder
   (It wasn't me)
   She stayed until it was over

6. These formulations certainly resonate with this group's (other) interview data, which we cannot go into in detail here.

7. We also could say that Vic as narrator positions himself vis-à-vis these discourses, result-ing in his—to a degree quite clever—maneuvers.

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Constructing ethnicity in New Zealand workplace stories*

MEREDITH MARRA and JANET HOLMES

Abstract

One important function of narratives in workplace interaction is the valuable contribution they make to the construction of complex social identities. These identities typically include a professional or workplace identity, but may also include other facets of self. In the New Zealand workplace, a mainstream 'white' identity can be considered the unmarked, communicative cultural norm. In this context, storytelling provides a creative and socially acceptable strategy for constructing a contrasting ethnic identity. This paper explores the ways in which ethnicity is constructed in a New Zealand Māori organization that comprises an ethnically distinct community of practice. An extended narrative sequence (extracted from a naturally occurring meeting) is analyzed in detail for this purpose. Despite the predominance of English as the language of work in this organization, there is abundant evidence of the pervasive relevance of Māori cultural principles. For these workers, ethnicity acts as a backdrop for all their workplace communication; well-established culturally based norms underpin the ways in which they interact, and the ways in which they construct their social (including ethnic) identity. In this context, the stories told at work contribute not only to the construction of the ethnic identity of individual speakers, but also provide a means for co-constructing a distinctive Māori identity for the group.

Keywords: narrative; identity construction; ethnicity; workplace; Māori.

1. Introduction

Cultural assumptions are, by definition, complex and difficult to access. As analysts we are continually searching for ways of 'finding culture' (Quinn 2005). Narratives provide one way in which we are able to